

The number of pensioners on the roll at the close of the year was 23,017, as follows: Old-age, 19,804; widows', 1,890; and military, 1,323. The old-age and widows' figures represent increases of 452 and 102 respectively, but the military pensions payable to veterans of the Maori War are a diminishing quantity, as the total deaths during the year amounted to 124, while the new pensions totalled 60.

During the year a miner's pension was provided for by the Miner's Phthisis Act, under which up to the 31st March 145 claims had been lodged. In 120 of these claims, including 16 by widows of miners, pensions were granted representing an annual charge of £5,445. The amount actually paid to the close of the year was £1,508.

WAR PENSIONS.

The War Pensions Act has been amended during the present session of Parliament, and has recently been so fully discussed in all its aspects that I need do no more here than state that it is certain to come up for further consideration later on, and that the country can be relied upon to do its duty in regard to those who have fought, and will yet fight, for the preservation and freedom of our Empire. The amount expected to come to charge during this year will probably approximate £200,000, but whatever amount is required will be provided for.

COOK ISLANDS.

The administration of the affairs of the Cook Islands, in accordance with the provisions of the Cook Islands Act of last session, has now been placed under the control of the Permanent Head of the Justice Department.

During the year public works have been carried out as far as the finances would permit.

Unfortunately, the revenue of the Islands has been seriously affected by recent hurricanes, and the lack of tonnage due to the war has further affected the financial position. A material improvement cannot be looked for until after the war.

The loyalty of the Natives to the Empire has been splendidly demonstrated by their voluntary contributions of men and money, and also of comforts for the men at the front. Niue Island has now some 150 men on active service, and Rarotonga has contributed forty-five men, while many more are ready and anxious to serve their country.

IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT SUPPLIES.

The arrangement entered into with the Imperial Government by which all beef, mutton, and lamb available for export should be purchased on account of the Imperial Government, and which became operative on the 3rd March, 1915, has been continued throughout the year.

The total shipments up to the 9th May, 1916, have been—

719,089 quarters beef.
3,045,732 carcasses mutton.
4,376,426 carcasses lamb.

The payments to freezing companies and producers have amounted to £9,143,794.

The question of the supply of insulated tonnage has been a matter of considerable concern to the Government. Representations have been made to the Imperial Government, with the object of securing additional insulated tonnage. In response to these representations, five steamers have been made available from Australia.

The number of insulated steamers despatched during the twelve months ending 31st March last was eighty-one, compared with eighty for the previous year.

Three steamers engaged as meat-carriers have been put out of commission—the "Clan McTavish" was sunk by the enemy, and the "Matatua" and "Rangatira" were lost as the result of marine casualties.

A clearance of the freezing-stores was practically effected when the new season commenced. At the beginning of May there remained in store approximately two million 60 lb. carcasses at the freezing-works, but the outlook for the balance of the season is favourable.